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5774 *R. Marsh*
The Advantage of Learning in Religion.

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd in the
CATHEDRAL-CHURCH in
CANTERBURY,
September the 1st, 1715.

AT THE
Anniversary Meeting

OF THE
Clergy and Gentlemen Educated at the
King's-School in that CITY.

*Published at the General Request of the Stewards
and Gentlemen then Present.*

By RICHARD MARSH, A. M.
Vicar of St. Margaret's At-Clif: *k*

L O N D O N,
Printed for R. Knaplock, in St. Paul's Church-Yard;
And Sold by E. Burges, in Canterbury. 1715.

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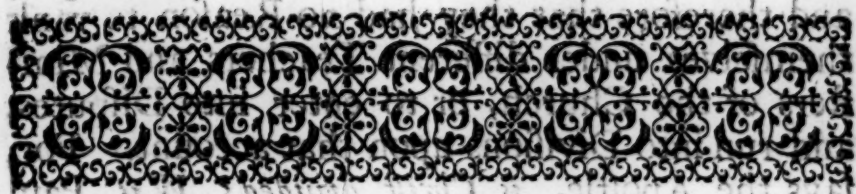
Published at the Grand Report of the Stewards
and Gentlemen then Present.

BY RICHARD MURSH, A.M.

Vicar of St. Margaret's at Cliffe

LONDON,

Printed for E. Newhook, in St. Paul's Church-Yard:
And sold by E. Budge, in Canterbury. 1792.



I COR. II. 4, 5.

My Speech and my Preaching was not with enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, but in Demonstration of the Spirit, and of Power:

That your Faith shou'd not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God.



THE Apostle in the First Chapter of this *Epistle*, takes notice of some Divisions in the Church of *Corinth*, which arose from the different Persons, that had Preach'd the Gospel, ver. 11, and 12, *It hath been declared unto me, of you my Brethren, by them which are of the House of Cloe, that there are Contentions among you: Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ: But he tells them at the 13th verse, that the several Persons that had been employ'd in their Conversion and Confirmation*

tion in the Faith, did Preach the same Gospel; and therefore that they had no Reason to rank themselves under different Teachers and Ministers of the Church, or to enter into Disputes, and run into Divisions upon that account. For, says the Apostle, *is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptiz'd in the Name of Paul?* That is, don't we all lay the same Foundation, which is Christ Jesus, and build the same Doctrines and Precepts upon it: But then he tells them further, that Christianity was not Founded upon the force of Wit and Eloquence: Christ sent me to Preach the Gospel, not with Wisdom of Words, least the Cross of Christ shou'd be made of none effect; and that God had chosen the foolish Things of this World to confound the wise, and weak Things of this World, to confound the Things that are mighty, and base Things of the World, and Things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and Things which are not, to bring to nought Things that are: That is, Christianity, how weak soever and contemptible it now appears in its Professors, shall every Day gain more and more Ground, and be at length too hard for Men of the greatest Learning and Power in the World, either by bringing them over to the Belief of this Doctrine, or by confounding their Infidelity, by the mighty Force and Demonstration of it: But not purely by Humane Means and World-
ly

Learning in Religion.

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ly Designs, that as the Apostle says, *No Flesh shou'd glory in his Presence, but according as it is written, he that Glorieth, let him Glory in the Lord.* And therefore, says the Apostle, *My Speech and my Preaching was not with enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, but in Demonstration of the Spirit, and of Power, that your Faith shou'd not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God:* The natural Meaning of which Words seems to be this, that as Christianity was of a Divine Institution, so it depended purely upon a Divine Assistance; not that the Apostle did intend by these Words to condemn the use of Human Learning in Religion, as some either ignorantly or wilfully have mistaken him, but his Design is to assert, that it was not built upon that Foundation, neither did it subsist upon it, but purely upon a Divine Power.

And therefore in Discoursing upon these Words, I shall treat of these Two Things.

I. That Humane Learning, and a due use of our Reason, are not only allowable, but are great helps to us in Matters of Religion, and in a right Understanding of the Scriptures.

II. I shall shew, that notwithstanding this, our Faith stands not in the Wisdom of Men, but in Demonstration of the Spirit and Power of God, according to the true Meaning and Intent of the Apostle.

First,

First, Humane Learning, and a due use of our Reason, are not only allowable, but are great Helps to us in Matters of Religion, and a right Understanding of the Scriptures. And this will appear, I think, to be very evident;

1st, From the Nature of the Thing, and the Design and Reason of God's implanting in us so noble a Principle.

2d, From the Practice of the Apostle in this Matter.

1st, From the Nature of the Thing, and the Design of God's Implanting in us so noble a Principle: How disrespectfully soever some Men speak of Reason, and of the Advantages, which a due Exercise and Improvement of it brings to Mankind, certainly it does not deserve such hard Words and severe Expressions. In our Dealings and Affairs in the World, we reckon it a mighty help, and a great Instrument, to promote our Happiness, and to turn our Labour and Industry to the best Account: And can we think, that we must not make use of this in Religion, which is of a far greater Concern and Consequence; and indeed the principal and chief End of God's fixing so wise and knowing a Principle in us? In every thing else we allow ourselves to Act upon this Principle; and is Religion only an unreasonable Thing? Ought not Religion to be the great Business and Concern, and Employment of the Soul? And is not the
Soul

Soul the Spring and Origin of Reason and Judgment, of Sense and Knowledge, of Wisdom and Prudence? The Being of a God, which is the Foundation of all Religion, is discoverable by Human Reason, and strikes the Mind of a considering Man, with an irresistible Conviction: It is by this wise Instrument we find and are certain, that there is an Almighty God that Made us, and does Govern us; and that neither we, nor the World, nor any thing besides Himself, is eternal: And what is more, all Revelation supposes a God; because this is suppos'd to be his Will, which he has by such Ways and Means, as he has judg'd most proper and convenient, delivered to Mankind for the Rule of their acting, and the Measure and Standard of their Obedience: But we have no other way of finding out which is God's Revelation, and which is not, but by examining the Pretences that are made to it, that is, whether it is such a Revelation, as is agreeable to the Notions we have of him, and whether it has such external Marks and Characters, as can assure us, it cou'd come from no other Hands: All this plainly belongs to the Province of Reason, it being impossible for a Man, without a particular Revelation, to find out which is God's Will, and which is not, without considering the Arguments that make it out to be so; but this cannot be done without Reason, nor so well neither without Reason improv'd, that is, without the Help

of Learning, which is the greatest Ornament and Advantage of it: And as we can't be assur'd, which is God's Revelation, without considering the Arguments and Proofs that are brought for it, so neither can we think to understand the Sense and Meaning of Scripture by any other Way or Method. God's Revealed Will, I mean so much of it, as concerns the Belief and Practice of every Christian, is very plain and easy to be understood, and it were an Impiety to think otherwise: But then are not the plainest Things to be judg'd of, and can this be done without making use of our Reason? One wou'd take this to be a plain Case; yet as plain as it is, there are a Sort of Men in the World, that cry down Reason and Sense in such a Manner, as indeed shews, they have very little of them, and who make use of that little Learning and Reason they have, to shew there is no Occasion for them in Religion: They hear *St. Paul* speaking against the Wisdom of this World, of destroying the Wisdom of the Wise, and of bringing to nothing the understanding of the Prudent, and so they are resolv'd, if that wou'd serve them, to be as Ignorant as they can; little considering that the Christian Religion is the most reasonable Religion in the World, and that the Apostle does not by these Expressions condemn the use of Reason in Religion, but only the Abuses of it; and that Christianity is such a noble Institution, and gave such Evidence of its Divinity,
that

that had Men Acted upon Reason, and considered the Motives and Arguments for its Credibility without Prejudice, they must have been convinced by them: So again when these Men find the Apostle saying, *that God hath chosen the foolish Things of the World to confound the Wise, and that it hath pleas'd God by the Foolishness of Preaching, to save them that believe;* they presently cry out, that Humane Knowledge, is a Damning Sin, and that a Man of Parts and Learning, can neither find the Way to Heaven himself, nor be able to teach others, how they shall find it: Then we hear from them, *Where is the Wise? Where is the Scribe? Where is the Disputer of this World? Hath not God made foolish the Wisdom of this World?* True, but he has not confounded Reason or Human Learning yet: Strange, that Men can be so deluded! Well, we may see that Ignorance is the Mother of Devotion among some others, as well as among those of the Church of Rome. But what is it, these Men wou'd be at? Why, they pretend to such great Influences and Inspirations of the Holy Spirit, that they condemn all Helps of Learning and Assistance of Humane Reason; and to this purpose they abuse and wrest several Texts of Scripture; But I shall shew the Folly and Vanity of this, by considering

Second, The great Advantage, that Learning affords us in Matters of Religion. If the Languages in which the Holy Scriptures are Originally Indited, were not understood, where

I wonder, wou'd there have been any Reveal'd Religion: So that under God's Providence, the Profession of the Christian Religion is owing to Human Learning: For what wou'd have signified the Words in the Bible, if the Sense and Meaning of them had not been preserv'd? The Scriptures then indeed wou'd have been a dead Letter, if they had not been understood: Translations cou'd never have been made, if the Skill and Knowledge of the Original Tongues had been lost: So that in short, these Men, how much soever they cry down and debase Human Learning, are beholding to this very Thing they condemn, for what they know of the Christian Religion; which all their vain Pretences to the Spirit, cou'd never have kept up, had there been no ingenious Education and good Literature in the World? Is it not then a shame to hear Men speak against a thing that is of so great Concern; and to vilify that, which Christians in all Ages had in so great Esteem, and made such excellent Use and Advantage of, for the Service of God and Religion?

But besides this, as plain as the Holy Scriptures are, there are in them a great many Expressions, the true Meaning of which, does in a great Measure depend upon such Usages and Customs, as are only known to those that are acquainted with the Languages, that give an account of them: I don't say, but that the Sum of a Christian's Belief and Practice,

is very plain and easy to be understood, but he that shall go about to explain all Places of Scripture without the help of Antiquity and Primitive Practice, will, I think, be able to give but a very indifferent Account of it : And besides there wants Judgment and Application to set the different Texts of Scripture in a true Light, the want of which has been too often a very great Hindrance and Blemish to the Christian Religion. The Holy Scriptures have been abus'd by Men of the weakest as well as of the greatest Capacities, and 'tis hard to tell, whether Religion has suffered more from the abuse of Learning and Sense, than from Confidence and Ignorance : For with what Forehead can Men pretend to as great Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as even the Apostles themselves had : These Men, forsooth, wou'd seem to do nothing in Religion without an immediate and extraordinary Motion and Influence of the Holy Spirit, and so they throw by Learning and Reason, and one wou'd think even common Sense too : This is nothing with them, *but the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, Carnal and Fleshly Reason,* and other such Expressions, which, though taken out of Scripture, were no more intended to vilify Human Learning, than they were design'd to perswade Men, to turn Fools and Brutes.

But what Evidence, I wonder, do these Men give of their Inspiration ? Can they speak all Languages as the Apostles did, and do all those
extrordinary

extraordinary Things, which distinguish'd their Powers, from what is ordinary and common? Our Blessed Saviour Appeals to His Miracles, for the Proof of His extraordinary Mission, and he tells the Jews, *that if he had not done those mighty Works among them, which never Man did, they had not had Sin*: And His Apostles us'd all along the same Method, and therefore these Despisers of Human Learning, and bold Pretenders to Inspiration, assume more to themselves, than our Saviour or his Apostles offered to do: They were forc'd to give such Signs of their Inspiration, as were evident to Sense, and to make appear to the World, that they were Acted by the Holy Spirit, by the External Demonstrations of it: But these Men wou'd have us believe them, without giving any other Proof of what they say, but of right-down Confidence and Ignorance: For is there any thing in their Discourses, that looks like the Writings of the Apostles, save only a few Scripture Expressions, which are either brought in impertinently, or profanely abus'd: So that in short, they may as well decry Religion as Learning, there being to an impartial Considerer, as little Signs in them of the Knowledge of the one, as of the other.

I proceed in the Second Place to shew the Practice of the Apostle in this Matter. That St. Paul had had the Education of a Scholar, we have his own Authority, who tells us, *that he was bred up at the Feet of Gamaliel*:
And

And that he had been conversant in Heathen Writings, appears from his quoting some Passages out of them: From whence we may modestly infer, that if Human Learning was no necessary Qualification, as no doubt it was not in those Days, yet is it no Objection against God's calling of any Man to His Service. But least some Men shou'd think, that St. Paul, after he was called to be an Apostle, did condemn Human Learning, and the Arts of moving the Passions, I shall produce Two or Three Instances, out of a great many in his Epistles, that seem to equal the best Compossures of Human Eloquence.

The First shall be this, *Rom. v. 3. Knowing that Tribulation worketh Patience, and Patience Experience, and Experience Hope:* Had this been found in a Heathen Author, we shou'd, as one observes, have call'd it a *Climax*, the Term of Art for such a Figure, which is a regular Gradation from one thing to another, as is plainly to be seen in this Passage of the Apostle. So, *1 Cor. iv. St. Paul gives another admirable Instance of Eloquence: God hath set forth us the Apostles last, as it were appointed to Death: For we are made a Spectacle to the World, and to Angels and to Men, we are Fools for Christ sake, but ye are wise in Christ: we are weak, but ye are strong: ye are honourable but we are despised: even unto this present Hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and are buffeted, and have no certain Place, and Labour, working with our own Hands: being*
reviled,

reviled, we bless; persecuted, we suffer; being defam'd, we intreat: we are as the filth, and are the off-scouring of Things unto this Day: If this be not Eloquence, I'd fain know, what is: 'Tis indeed so noble a Piece of it, that as one says, he will be bound to equal it with any one Passage in Cicero or Demosthenes, ev'n according to Aristotle and Quintilian's Rules.

Lastly, 2 Cor. xi. 21. We meet with another Instance of the Eloquence of the Apostle: I shall take up too much Time in repeating it; but what follows at the 22d verse, is yet more surprizing; who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the Things that concern my Infirmities: Here, as the same Author observes, the Heroicalness of the Apostle's Religion inspires his Stile with a new Degree of Sublimity, and gives it such a turn of Grandure, and nobleness of Thought, as is unimitable by Pagan Eloquence: And if these are so Fine in their Translations, how much nobler must they appear in their Originals? Translations seldom or ever, doing Justice to an Author; especially in the Scriptures, which are Translated Word for Word, without any regard to Cadence or pleasing the Ear.

I cou'd bring other Instances from the Writings of the Apostle, but I think these sufficient to my purpose: By which it appears, that St. Paul had not such a Contempt for Humane Learning, as some Men vainly imagine,
but

but thought that it might upon Occasion be serviceable in some measure to Religion.

I come to the Second General Head, viz., to shew that notwithstanding this, our Faith stands not in the Wisdom of Men, but in Demonstration of the Spirit and Power of God.

And in order to this, I shall briefly inquire into these Three Things.

I. What the Apostle means by enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, and by the Demonstration of the Spirit and Power of God.

II. How these by the Apostle are oppos'd to each other.

III. I shall shew that the Reasons, upon which we believe the Christian Religion to be true, are solely grounded upon a Divine Authority.

First, By enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, the Apostle no doubt, means all Rhetorical Proofs or probable Arguments, all Humane Ways and Methods of arguing and convincing, such as are to be found in the Writings of Men unassisted by any Divine Power and Supernatural Means of making out the Truth and Certainty of the Thing they assert, and in short, the Apostle's Design is to exclude all Humane Methods in General, from having any Force or Power, in supporting the Foundation of the Christian Faith; and therefore, by the Demonstration of the Spirit and the Power of God, he must mean that the Christian Religion stood solely upon the Evidence of Miracles and Prophecies, and consequently that the Faith of every Christian is ultimately resolv'd into the Authority

rity and Testimony of God himself. We know, that the Apostles were his Messengers and Ambassadors to Men, by these their extraordinary and miraculous Powers, and we know this to be God's Will, by the mighty Works they have done, which is as it were God's setting his Seal to the Truth of it: And therefore the Apostle tells the *Corinthians*, *that the Kingdom of God is not in Word but in Power, and in the Holy Ghost.*

Second, St. Paul opposes these to each other, to shew us, that the Foundation and Grounds of our Faith, subsists not upon Humane but Divine Authority, and that we believe the Christian Religion to be true, because it has all the Signs and Characters of a Divine Revelation: But this is no more an Argument against Humane Learning and Reason in Matters of Religion, because it was not first Founded by them, than it is an Argument against making use of them, in understanding the Works of the Creation, because the World was not at first made by them: For the Apostle's Design is not to run down Human Knowledge, but only to shew that the Christian Faith was not founded upon it: In a word, his main end is to assert the Divine Authority of the Christian Religion, and that Human Reason and Power, had no Hand in the Foundation of it.

Therefore, *Third*, our Faith, that is, the Reason why we believe the Christian Religion to be true, must be wholly grounded upon an Authority, that is purely Divine: So that notwithstanding,

withstanding, we allow that a good use may be made of Learning, in Matters of Religion; yet we don't build our Faith upon this Foundation: We confess indeed, that we have no immediate and extraordinary Inspiration, but withal we believe, that the Apostles were endow'd with this Power, and that they indited the Holy Scriptures, by the Help and Assistance of this unerring and infallible Spirit, and consequently, *that our Faith stands not in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God.* I shall now make some few Observations from the whole, and so conclude.

First, Though we don't pretend to an extraordinary influence of the Holy Spirit, yet we believe, and every good Man may have an experience of this Truth, that our Power of doing good, and avoiding of evil, is owing to God's assisting and preventing Grace: It is he that works in us, both to Will and to Do, he enlighteneth our Understandings in judging, and directs our Wills in chusing that which is Good; and in a word, it is by his Holy Spirit, that we are enabled to bring forth the blessed Fruits of it: For to assert so far the Freedom of Human Actions, as thereby to exclude the Power and Efficacy of God's Grace, is certainly to run from one extreme into another. Though we are not conscious of the manner of God's Holy Spirit working upon our Souls, yet that is no Reason, why we shou'd disbelieve it: For we neither know, how the Soul Acts upon the Body, nor indeed how it thinks itself: And it

seems plain to me, that the main Difference between good and bad Men's Actions, proceeds from the use or abuse of Grace, for though the Difference of Parts and Education are to be considered in the Case, yet that cannot be the only Reason: Because there are of both these Sorts, I mean, of good and bad Men; and therefore the difference does certainly arise from something else, which I think must be from God's Grace, Co-operating with the one, and not with the other, as they use or reject it, according to that Freedom which God hath given to Humane Actions, without which, Religion cannot well subsist: Because otherwise, we cannot be entitled to Rewards and Punishments. The Learned therefore have as much Occasion for God's Grace, as the Unlearned, and the one may abuse it, as well as the other, and the one seems to have more to answer for than the other: For to whom more is giv'n, of them more will be expected.

The *Second* Observation I wou'd make, is this, that the best and most improved Reason, such as, for Example, was that of the great *Socrates*, is but a weak and uncertain thing to rely upon, in Comparison to that certainty of a future State, which is only to be had from Revelation: For that great Man, with all his Study and Knowledge, cou'd even at his Death, go no further in this Case, than to say, *I hope to go hence to good Men: But of this I am not very Confident, nor does it become any wise Man to be so: I, says he, to his Friends, must now Die, and you shall Live,*
but

but which of us shall be in the better State, God only knows: And both he and *Cebes*, do ingenuously confess, that these Things relating to the Soul, were disbelieved by the greatest Part of Mankind: And therefore happy are we, if we are but sensible of our own Happiness, that we enjoy the clearer Discoveries of that ever-to-be-valued Gospel, which hath brought Life and Immortality to light. With what Pleasure may we suppose, wou'd *Socrates* have receiv'd this, and the rest of the great Truths of the Holy Scriptures, for which some Christians Now-a-days, have so mean and low an Esteem, as to prefer the Writings of this and other Heathens before them. In reading the Writings of the Ancient Philosophers, it is not, I think, the least use that ought to be made of them, to observe with what uncertainty they treat of Things relating to Religion, and how lame they are in their Accounts of the Worship of God, and of the Divine Attributes and Perfections: Insomuch, that an ordinary Christian, who has been but moderately instructed in his Religion, has much better Apprehensions of the true Knowledge and Worship of God, than can be found in whole Volumes of the Heathen Philosophy: And the Observation, I think, is just, that those Philosophers, who liv'd after Christianity was known, had better Notions of Religion, and enforc'd the Duties of it, with greater Strength of Reason, which, if true, no doubt was owing to some Knowledge they must have had of the Scriptures, and of the Practice of Christians, and of the Writings of the Professors

Professors of this Religion. Let it not then, for shame, be laid to the Charge of any Christian, to be guilty of so great a Sin, as to put a greater Value and Esteem upon the Writings of Men, than upon the Word of God: But if there be any that are Guilty of this, they have Reason to fear, that God will deal more severely with them, than with those, who have had, as it may be presum'd, much less Opportunities to know his Will.

The Last Observation I shall make, is this, that, as Learning, without Revelation does want its greatest Help and Support, so on the other Hand, I will shew, how far the Christian Religion has suffered through the want of Learning: And of this I will give Two Famous Examples.

First, It was to Learning more especially, under Providence, that we owe the Reformation, at which Time, by the New Appearance of the *Greek* Tongue, which was little known here before, and by the Restoration of the *Latin*, which had been miserably Corrupted, those thick mists of Ignorance and Superstition were dispell'd, which Popery had spread over the whole Face of Religion in this Kingdom: When the Royal Founder of this School, laid the First Foundation for a Reformation, and his good Son made a great Progress in it, but his Glorious Daughter, the incomparable Queen *Elizabeth*, that great Ornament of Learning herself, put the last finishing stroke to it. Before this Time, there was little Learning in Men's Heads, and that little not good for much: But the greatest Part lay upon Shelves, and as They were cover'd over with Filth

Filth and Dust, so was the Kingdom over-run with Ignorance and Superstition. But the Restoration of Learning, soon made the Errors of Popery to vanish: The Holy Scriptures came quickly to be better understood, and the Knowledge of the Ancient Customs and Practices of the Primitive Church, made the Necessity of a Reformation plain and evident. By this Weapon, I mean, of Learning, the Church of Rome, was beat out of its Ground in this Kingdom, in which, by imposing upon the Credulity and Ignorance, especially of the common People, they had so long intrench'd and secur'd themselves, and were in a short Time, with Shame and Confusion, forc'd to quit the Kingdom, where they must never more expect to enter, till they can reduce us to the same State of Ignorance again: Which they had well nigh done in that dismal Confusion the Nation was in, under the great Rebellion: For that they had a great hand and share in those Troubles, that beset that blessed King, more especially that they did afterwards all they cou'd, to Poison his Children with their Superstition, is Matter of Fact, and cannot be denied.

But Secondly, I speak not this, in the least to excuse those Guilty Wretches, who at that sad Time, brought the Nation into the utmost Confusion, and had almost destroy'd the best Church in the World: No, there were those amongst us, that notwithstanding their loud cry against Popery, did put in Practice the same wicked and pernicious Principles, that under that Mask, they might with the more ease destroy both Church and

and State, and by their barbarous Practices; did all they cou'd, to involve us, if possible, in a greater degree of Ignorance and Superstition again: When by their base and impious endeavours, to destroy our Schools and Universities, a sad and almost Total Eclipse was seen in this Kingdom, both of good Learning and true Religion: And all this effected, more especially, by a confident pretence to Inspiration, but brought about (God so suffering it) by the sole Power of the Sword. But it has pleas'd God, long ago, in Mercy to put an end to these Confusions, and to restore with the Monarchy and Church, the Seats of Learning, to their former Flourishing Condition; and let us pray for the long continuance of them, and more especially for the School to which we owe our Education; which as it has the Honour to be of a Royal Foundation, may it never want a King to Support and Defend it, from His present Most Gracious Majesty, down to late Posterity; may the Venerable and Reverend Body, under whose Eye and Care it is, long Live to inspect and oversee it: May it always have wise and able Masters to instruct it, and who may be a Credit and an Ornament to it: May it continue to encrease under the present worthy Governor: And may it always Thrive, may it always Flourish.

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, Three Persons, but One God, be ascrib'd all Power, Dominion, Majesty and Might now and evermore. Amen.

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